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## Growth of the Bible in Japan.

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DOUBTLESS many of the Society's friends have heard something of the strange entrance of the Bible into Japan. The story has already appeared in several versions; but as I was able, while in Japan, to ascertain the leading facts, at first hand, from those who were personally acquainted with them, and to verify details from the lips and pens of men who have given them publicity, I desire to place on record the whole narrative.

In 1854 the British fleet anchored in the beautiful harbour of Nagasaki, in the south of

Japan. This was four years before the ratification of the treaty of commerce, in virtue of which English ships are free to visit certain ports in the hitherto excluded empire. English statesmen were then pressing the treaty on Japan, and the arrival of war ships, while negotiations were still in progress, created a great stir in Nagasaki. Troops poured into the town, and swarmed out of their hives like wasps when their nests are disturbed. They had assembled in great force to prevent a British landing which had never been intended.

The soldiers were under the command of a distinguished general called Wakasa, who traced his descent from a noble family ; and his business was to prevent, if necessary by force of arms, any communication between the foreign fleet and the people. In the discharge of his duty the commander-in-chief was accustomed to sail round the harbour in a swift boat to see that the British were holding no intercourse with his people.

During the days that the English lay within sight of the beautiful green hills and white villas of Nagasaki, some one dropped his English New Testament into the sea. It may have been a copy placed by gentle hands, accompanied by a mother's prayers, among her son's things, as he left the old home, or it may have been the treasured companion of some man of God. Whence it came we shall never know ; but we are certain

it did not fall into the sea by chance. It was God's bread sown upon the waters. General Wakasa, on one of his rounds, saw the book in the water. Being a Japanese, he was curious to know what the book contained. Perhaps it might compromise the foreigners who had rudely entered their harbour.

The book was carefully dried, and taken to the interpreter, who happened to be a Dutchman. He declared it to be the Christian's Bible that told of God, and Christ, and the future life. The general's curiosity was excited. He must know the contents of the Christian's book. On making further enquiries he learned that it had been translated into Chinese. He sent to Shanghai and procured a copy.

When the English fleet departed from Nagasaki, the commander-in-chief returned to his home at Saga. He was now at leisure, and in company with his brother Ayabe, and a near relation called Molino, and two friends of his family, he began the study of the New Testament.

All educated Japanese read classical Chinese. The little company of four read and studied the Delegates' New Testament. They understood the version, and without a teacher penetrated through the crusts of the translation to the Gospel significance.

Eight years later, in 1862, Dr. Verbeck of the Reformed Dutch Church of America, was at Nagasaki as a missionary. Christianity was

a forbidden religion at that time in Japan. One day he was surprised by a visit from a gentleman of high rank of whom he knew nothing. It was Ayabe, the brother of Wakasa. He wanted instruction regarding the Christian religion, and explanations of passages in the New Testament which he did not understand. Dr. Verbeck gladly instructed him more fully, and he found him not only an apt, but a grateful pupil; for early in the following year he came to the missionary secretly by night, and at the peril of his life, and warned him of impending danger. Owing to this timely warning Dr. Verbeck was enabled to escape safely to China.

When the danger had passed, Dr. Verbeck returned again to Nagasaki. His friend and saviour in the meantime had gone as an official to another part of the island, and the circumspection incumbent on missionaries in those days did not admit of enquiries as to natives in high station.

Soon, however, another nobleman called on Dr. Verbeck. This time it was Molino, whom Wakasa had sent to get information regarding passages in the New Testament that he did not understand, and to procure for him other religious books. Molino had in the meantime learned English, and he continued to come and go between Wakasa and Dr. Verbeck, carrying with him books and instruction for the space of three years.

On May 14th, 1866, a messenger came in hot haste to Dr. Verbeck to say that a great official,

with his suite, had arrived in Nagasaki and wished to have an interview with him. The party at whose coming the town had been moved proved to be Wakasa and his two sons, Ayabe and the friend Molino.

Wakasa was then a minister of state, the governor of a province. He came to Dr. Verbeck with a splendid retinue. He was a tall and dignified old gentleman, with courteous and attractive manners. He spoke freely of the long years he had been studying the Gospels, of his pleasure at meeting a Christian teacher, and especially of the joy with which he had first read the story of Jesus Christ. "I was," he said, "filled with admiration, overwhelmed with emotion, and taken captive by the record of His nature and life."

At the close of a long interview, in which he showed great familiarity with the Bible, Dr. Verbeck was surprised by the great man asking him to baptize him and his brother. Molino also wished to be baptized. There was something of the martyr spirit in the request, for Wakasa knew that the Christian religion was condemned, and that to embrace it would be attended with peril to all concerned. But he was steadfast in his purpose, and after much conversation as to the nature of the ordinance, Dr. Verbeck agreed to comply with his request.

On the following Sunday evening Wakasa, his brother Ayabe, and Molino, arrived at the

appointed time. Their escort was dismissed, with instructions to return for them after an hour. With the shutters closed, so that no prying eyes might see what was going forward, Dr. Verbeck baptized the three illustrious Japanese who had been brought to Christ in so strange a way. Then the four Christian brethren united in celebrating the Lord's Supper, and perhaps never since that first night in the large upper room were the Saviour's dying commands obeyed under circumstances more solemn and wonderful.

At the close of the ceremony Wakasa expressed himself supremely happy in having obtained what he had so long and ardently hoped for. Then he told the story of the English New Testament found in the sea at Nagasaki, and of the blessing that it had brought to him and his family. Dr. Verbeck sent a full account of the matter to his mission, and after Wakasa and his friends had joined the church of the firstborn, the story was made public.

Many years had passed. Wakasa had died in the Christian faith about 1872. Dr. Verbeck had removed to Tokyo, and his place had been taken by the Rev. Mr. Booth. One Sunday morning, in the month of April, 1880, Mr. Booth was surprised to see in the front row of his audience two ladies of rank. They paid close attention to all he said, and at the close of the service introduced themselves as Wakasa's daughter and her nurse. Her father had taught his

family the truths of Christianity, and she and one of her brothers were true believers.

She had come to Nagasaki, and with her nurse had sought for the missionary. They had met a priest who gave them a Prayer-book. They afterwards discovered the Bible Depôt, and in looking over the books recognised "The Sermon on the Mount," and from the keeper of the Depôt they learned where they should find the church.

Like her father Wakasa, the lady came to receive the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Mr. Booth saw her on the following day, and found that she and her nurse were true believers in the Lord Jesus, having been well instructed in the truths of the Bible. On the following Sunday the lady, accompanied by her husband, attended at the church, and with her faithful nurse was baptized. "I shall never," said Mr. Booth, "forget the expression of peaceful joy that shone in the faces of the two women as they went away."

The nurse returned to Saga to make known to others the joy that filled her own heart. She began at once to teach a few bright little girls. Soon she had a class of women studying the Bible, and as soon as these were able to teach she opened a Sunday-school. Soon there were forty Christians in the town brought to Christ chiefly by her efforts. She rests from her labours, but her work is carried on by others whom the Lord has raised up.

Wakasa's daughter went with her husband to Osaka, and her home became a centre of Christian beneficence. She used her high station and influence in furthering the Christian cause. When her husband on one occasion returned from a visit to one of the many islands, he told her of a people whom he had seen who were without any religion. Her heart was touched, and she at once proposed to pay half the salary of a missionary to the neglected island. At a later period she returned to Nagasaki, where she and her daughter were among the most useful and exemplary of the church members.

Years passed bringing many changes, and one day in 1884 Dr. Verbeck was assisting at a meeting in Tokyo. At the close of the meeting an aged gentleman stepped up to him, and said, "I am Ayabe, the brother of Wakasa." He had been in the army, and also on survey work, but he had never gone on any undertaking without his Bible.

He was accompanied by his daughter, a young lady fifteen years old. Ayabe sought baptism for his daughter. It was a joyous meeting between Ayabe and his old friend and teacher, and father and daughter were soon members of the Rajimachi church in the capital.

These are the simple facts as told by Dr. Verbeck and others, and confirmed by Mr. H. Loomis, who gave me full permission to use them in any way I might think fit. How God's harvest waits upon God's sowing!



During the years covered by this story there was much anxiety on the part of the awakened church to occupy Japan; but owing to many circumstances the kingdom was closed to the Gospel. Drs. Hepburn, Verbeck, and Brown, arrived in 1859, but down to 1868 only eight or nine missionaries had reached the country, and the number resident there did not at any time exceed five or six.

Nor had the missionaries at that date mastered the language. They had no grammars, or vocabularies, or dictionaries, and owing to the severe laws against Christianity, they found it difficult to get native assistance, or instruction of any kind.

The spoken language was not difficult to learn, reading and writing was another matter. The Chinese written characters had been borrowed by the Japanese, and to these they added a syllabary of their own invention, and the missionaries had to master both in order to become masters of the language, or to become acquainted with the literature.

The difficulty was increased by the fact that the languages of China and Japan are so unlike each other in their structure, and that the Chinese characters can only be used in a Japanese way. The two systems are intertwined, the symbolic and the syllabic, without being congenial to each other.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, Bishop Williams, Drs. Verbeck, Brown, and Hepburn, were labouring on the work of translation, and Dr.

Brown had translated the four Gospels, and the book of Genesis. Others were translating the Epistles, and Dr. Hepburn, in addition to translation work, was engaged on a dictionary. The educated in Japan were buying and reading the Chinese New Testament, but the great want of the mission was a Japanese Bible, and to the work of producing one the best energies of the mission were given.

After five and a half years' translation and revision, the text of the New Testament was completed on March 30th, 1880, and the first New Testament in the Japanese tongue was published on the 17th of April of the same year. The New Testament was the work of a translation committee appointed by a convention of missionaries in 1872. While it was in preparation the missionaries met at Tokyo in 1876, and set apart four of their number to translate the Old Testament, in harmony with the New. These translators met regularly for about a year and completed the first eleven chapters of Genesis, which were published in 1877. Several books of the minor prophets were translated by the Rev. J. Piper, and published, but the committee was dissolved, and their work passed into the hands of a permanent committee appointed by a convention which met at Tokyo in June, 1878.

At first the different parts of the Old Testament were assigned to committees of missionaries residing in the large towns. Under this arrangement the

Rev. P. K. Fyson translated the Book of Joshua ; Mr. Davidson, 2 Kings ; Mr. Thompson, Genesis ; and Dr. Hepburn, the Book of Proverbs.

At a meeting of the Permanent Committee in 1882, a new method was adopted, and Dr. Verbeck, Dr. Hepburn, and Mr. Fyson, were appointed a translating and revising committee, and these scholars, accepting all that was best from the accumulated translations of their predecessors, completed the Bible. It was an arduous work, and a great meeting was held on February 3rd, 1888, at Tokyo, to celebrate the publication of the Japanese Bible.

“This delay,” said Dr. Hepburn, who occupied the chair, “has proved to be a great advantage, in that it has been the means of securing greater uniformity of style and oneness in the various books. The style of the Old Testament has been made to conform to that of the New, so that there is complete uniformity in this respect ; as much, I may say, as if both translations had been the work of one person.”

This splendid result has been achieved, not alone by the scholarship and perseverance of the chief translators, but by the constant care of two native Christian scholars, Messrs. Matsuyama and Takahashi Goro, who aided first in the production of the New Testament and then of the Old, giving uniformity to the style and character of the version.

The translators had the advantage of comparing

their work, as it proceeded, with the Revised English Version, and they availed themselves of the light to be had from the best critical and grammatical works, and from other versions of the Holy Scriptures, ancient and modern. Speaking broadly, the American Bible Society bore the expense of the New Testament, and the British and Foreign Bible Society, and the National Bible Society of Scotland, that of the Old. It should also be added that the services of Dr. Hepburn were freely given by the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church of America.

Editions of the new version were multiplied in many forms. On June 8th, 1881, a marginal reference New Testament, prepared by the Rev. J. Piper, was published by the British and Scottish Societies. The edition consisted of 6,000 copies, 4,000 of which were printed on Japanese paper, and in Japanese style, and 2,000 on English paper, as an experiment. The books in English style were purchased so rapidly by the Japanese, that two further editions had to be brought out before the end of the year, while the books in pure Japanese style were neglected.

In 1894 the Bible was published in Roman letters. All defects discovered in the translations were corrected, and the version brought up to the latest standard of admitted excellence, and all new editions will be brought into harmony with it.

The latest achievement in connection with this version has been the publication of two dainty volumes with over-turning flaps that fasten in. The one is a small but clearly-printed pocket reference New Testament, and the other is the Gospel of St. John, so small that it will go easily into the waistcoat pocket. The latter has been largely circulated among the soldiers, and may come to be known yet as the *Soldier's Bible*. Other Gospels in the same style are being published.

The translators in Japan had one great advantage over the translators in China, they had few dialectic differences to contend with. Japanese is Japanese, and though there are *patois* in different parts, there is no occasion to introduce *patois* in books. The new Bible can be read with pleasure by every Japanese who can read, and those who cannot read it for themselves can understand it when they hear it read aloud by others.

One aboriginal language, the Ainu, has been discovered in Japan. It is spoken by an exceedingly ignorant and degraded people who live chiefly in the small villages which are scattered along the eastern and northern coast of the island of Yezo. They are supposed to number about 20,000, and as the capes, the mountains, and other leading features of Japan are known by Ainu names, they are believed to have once occupied the whole of Japan. The Ainu people are Polytheists, and worship the sun, the moon,

mountains, rivers, and such objects, all of which they believe have their own gods. They are a down-trodden and despised race, and by a slight play upon their name, the Japanese call them "dogs."

The Rev. J. Batchelor and his wife have devoted themselves to these outcasts, and in 1887 nine chapters of the Gospel of St. Matthew were printed in their language. There were then four of the Ainu baptized by Bishop Bickersteth. No European but Mr. Batchelor knew the language of these poor people, and their destiny rested in his hands.

It would be impossible to exaggerate the common discomforts of living among these really repulsive human beings, but in the spirit of the Master, Mr. Batchelor and his wife have gone among the doubly lost, and in a very marvellous manner are lifting them up. The New Testament and Book of Psalms were finished, and published in 1895.

These are the only versions needed for Japan. The growth has been late, but the work is now complete.

There is in Japan another race of pariahs, called the *Yeta*. Some say they are the descendants of Chinese noblemen, and some speak of them as the descendants of Corean captives. They are scattered throughout Japan, and are looked upon as little better than beasts. They, however, understand Japanese so that a new version is

not needed for them ; but just recently the Church in Japan has set apart a missionary to care for their souls.

The readers of this paper will wonder how it happened that the Japanese only received the Bible, as it were, yesterday. Many earnest attempts were made to provide a version, but the fulness of time only arrived when the missionaries occupied the land. Gutzlaff had made a translation of the New Testament at Singapore ; but when the Gospel of St. John was published, the version was declared vulgar and unidiomatic, and no more was published. The Gospels of St. Luke and St. John, and the Acts of Bettelheim's version were published, but they were found to be more Luchuan than Japanese, and of little value. The work has been done, and well done, by the missionaries at the very earliest opportunity, and there were many missionaries who rendered valuable aid in the translations whose names do not appear in this paper.

The work should have been done, but was not, by the Jesuits. Xavier arrived in Japan in 1549, and after thirty years there were 200 churches in Japan, and 15,000 converts. At a later period there were 600,000 Christians in the Empire, chiefly of the ruling classes—princes, admirals, generals. They reached a dominant position in the Empire, and true to their traditions, they abused their power. They did not give the Gospel to the people, but they introduced the

instruments of the inquisition, and the Roman idols which they called by Christian names.

In 1890 I was present at the great Japanese Exhibition in Tokyo, and I saw there a collection of the instruments of torture that the Jesuits had worked in Japan; and I did not wonder that the Japanese had driven, with great ferocity, the whole priestly horde from their lands. When the priests had gone, nothing remained but the thumb-screws and other instruments of their calling, and a door barred against Christianity.

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*The following Papers are also published in the Reprint Series, and may be obtained at the Bible House, 146, Queen Victoria Street, London, E.C.*

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